
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis of Social Media and Privacy-Related Anxiety Among College Students

Noriel R. Caillan

Faculty, Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines

Corresponding Author: Noriel Caillan, **E-mail:** ncgsrnd@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This research examined undergraduate 'digital natives' (N=198) from Northeastern College in the Philippines as part of an analysis on social media and privacy-related anxiety during the 2025 to 2026 school year; descriptive and correlational designs were used to evaluate 4 different types of anxiety related to social media: shared content, privacy concern, communication with others via social media, and anxiety about how others perceive their activity on social media. Data show that students who were surveyed experience mild to moderate levels of anxiety due to their use of social media (M = 3.37), with privacy-related concerns being a major contributor (M = 3.63); in particular, anxiety is related to unauthorized access to personal digital accounts and other people sharing information about someone without his/her permission. Significant ($p < .001$) positive correlations were observed between all four types of anxiety, but the highest correlation was between anxiety about shared content and anxiety about self-evaluating ($r = .649$). This conclusion suggests that students' levels of anxiety about their perceived self-worth are highly correlated with their curated digital identities. The S.H.I.E.L.D. Framework provides higher education institutions with a holistic approach to foster Wi-Fi privacy and digital wellness, going beyond merely raising awareness about online safety.

| KEYWORDS

privacy-related anxiety, Filipino college student, digital well-being, SHIELD framework

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 20 February 2026

PUBLISHED: 04 March 2026

DOI: 10.32996/jlds.2026.6.4.4

Introduction

Over the past several years, social media has become a pervasive part of everyday life for many college students in the Philippines. It influences how they communicate, learn, and handle their personal information. In higher education in the Philippines, evidence of social media's widespread use is raising significant questions about perceptions of privacy, online behavior, and the emotional impact of a digital life. The context of the Philippines is particularly noteworthy due to rapid smartphone adoption, high social media saturation among young adults, and shifting data privacy laws governed by both national laws and institutional policies (Mendoza et al., 2022; Canada et al., 2025; Oducado et al., 2019). Research shows that Filipino college students use social media extensively; their online environment has an effect on mental health, raises privacy concerns, and affects their ability to accomplish daily tasks, thus highlighting the importance of studying the privacy-related anxiety of this demographic (Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Lim et al., 2022; Cabacungan et al., 2022). This larger context provides the impetus for targeted investigation into the nature of social media-related anxiety among Filipino college students, focusing on its characteristics, causes, and strategies for prevention or minimization (Lim et al., 2022; Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Canada et al., 2025).

This proposed project targets four interdependent dimensions of social media anxiety, building on noted scholarship documenting the relationship between technology-induced anxiety (and privacy) and social anxiety; those four dimensions are sharing content/privacy-related issues, interacting with others, and evaluating yourself. Previous studies have shown a correlation between privacy-related perception(s) and psychological stress and behavioral response in online environments for many communities, including Filipinos utilizing both their own (local) data protection regulations and social media practices (Canadian et al., 2025; Oducado et al., 2019; Mendoza et al., 2022). Some studies detail how social media use among Filipino populations correlates with mental health outcomes, but the exact level may vary between user profile patterns or characteristics (Lim et al., 2022; Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Cabacungan et al., 2022). The proposed project aims to understand the polysemous/multi-faceted nature of social

media-related worry, particularly in respect to educational performance and health/wellness, within the context of Filipino students attending post-secondary education in the Philippines (Lim et al., 2022; Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Canada et al., 2025).

The study will begin with a general description of the respondents to develop adequate context for the pattern of anxiety that the participants in the study exhibit and then will analyze the four anxiety dimensions as they relate to and influence each other. Some prior Philippine studies have established a baseline for how demographic data and digital literacy impact student anxiety around privacy (for example, demographic comparative studies on Digital Footprint Awareness and Risk Perception among Adults and comparative studies evaluating awareness of Data Security in the Philippines (Mendoza et al., 2022; Olipas, 2023; Canada et al., 2025)). In addition to the above, there is also evidence from other countries that shows how frequent use of social media correlates with mental health outcomes, and this information informed expectations about how dimensions of online anxiety are predicted to relate to each other (Lim et al., 2022; Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Cabacungan et al., 2022). The method of using quantitative measures for both dimensions of anxiety and respondent profile variables will produce a Phil-specific psychosocial mapping of social media usage in higher education.

The literature gap regarding privacy-related anxiety in Filipino college students is a key research area. The research area has yet to fully explore the correlation between college student anxiety from the perspectives of four areas related to online life: 'content sharing,' 'managing privacy,' 'social interaction online,' and 'self-appraisal.' Even though several studies document the relationship between college student usage of social media and anxiety, there remains a relative lack of empirical research that demonstrates the relationship among the core dimensions of anxiety in a Filipino university context (Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Lim et al., 2022; Cabacungan et al., 2022). Also, there exists little evidence-based intervention for practitioners in higher education that addresses the issue of college student privacy-related anxiety through the inculcation of digital literacy, the use of privacy-preserving practices, and other mental health outcomes (Oducado et al., 2019; Canada et al., 2025). These gaps will help create further research on the Filipino higher education environment and can help guide support services for university students, campus policies/guidelines, and digital citizenship education within higher education (Oducado et al., 2019; Canada et al., 2025; Cabacungan et al., 2022).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of privacy-related anxiety within higher education in the Philippines and provides a basis for targeted activities to promote students' digital well-being and responsible social media use. By focusing on this problem, we show how important it is to turn our findings into practical steps for universities, such as creating policies and programs that address privacy education and mental health in Philippine universities. In addition, there are numerous gaps identified in this area that guide the following research questions.

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. Sex; and
 - 1.2. Age Group?
2. What is the status of the respondents' social media anxiety in terms of:
 - 2.1. Shared Content;
 - 2.2. Privacy Concerns;
 - 2.3. Interaction; and
 - 2.4. Self-evaluation?
3. Do the different dimensions of anxiety significantly correlate with one another?
4. What interventions can be developed to mitigate these anxieties?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research methodology using a descriptive-correlational research design. One of the principal reasons for choosing a descriptive design is to provide an accurate characterization of the participants, specifically to develop an objective description of their social characteristics and to assess the extent of their current anxiety levels regarding both social media and privacy. By providing an account of the contributions made by the participants (students) in terms of the content they share, their privacy concerns, their level of interaction with others, and their self-evaluations, the researcher is establishing a benchmark for understanding the psychological state of the students. The correlational aspect of the study enables the researcher to determine the statistical relationships among these variables and whether or not specific dimensions of anxiety (e.g., fear of being invaded) are statistically related to how they evaluate themselves and how they behave in relation to interacting with others. The non-experimental design allows the researcher to conduct the research without manipulating the participants' environment to obtain an accurate representation of how college students use technology/digital devices and their experiences associated with this.

Locale, Sampling Techniques, and Respondents

The location for this research project was selected based on the presence of a large number of "digital natives" who have incorporated technology into their personal and academic lives. The sample population of this study will be 198 undergraduates

who are attending Northeastern College during the 2025-2026 academic year. A stratified random sample will be used to maximize representativeness and minimize selection bias. The student body will be divided into different “strata” based on their respective colleges or year levels. One respondent will be randomly chosen from each stratum to create a sample that is representative of the entire institution rather than a single demographic group. This systematic selection process will improve the study’s external validity, allowing researchers to extrapolate the findings to the broader population of college students.

Research Instruments

The main method of collecting data was through the use of research questionnaire from Alkis, et al., (2017) titled “Development and Validation of Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media specifically designed to answer the research questions contained within this research project. The instrument consisted of various main parts: Part I (Demographics: Age, Gender, Course, and Social Media Use); Part II (Four Dimensions of Anxiety: Shared Content, Privacy Concerns, Interaction, and Self-Evaluation) using a 5-point Likert scale. To ensure that the instrument has scientific rigor, it went through content validation by a panel of experts in psychology and information technology. After being validated, a pilot study was conducted with non-participating students to determine a Cronbach’s alpha to establish whether or not the items have internal consistency and reliability prior to administering the instrument for the final time.

Data Analysis

A number of statistical analyses are used by the researchers to analyze the collected data. To address Research Question 1 (Profile), researchers have developed a frequency and percentage distribution to display the responses from the demographic questionnaire. To confirm Research Question 2 (Anxiety Level), researchers computed the weighted mean for anxiety experienced through four levels (and provided a minimum and maximum level) using verbal interpretations (i.e., high anxiety, medium anxiety, and low anxiety). To address Research Question 3 and assess relationships between two separate dimensions of anxiety, the researchers used Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation (also known as Pearson’s r) to measure the strength and direction (positive or negative) of relationships between anxiety dimensions. For example, will the relationship between privacy-related anxiety and self-evaluation anxiety be positive or negative? Finally, in addressing Research Question 4, the researcher developed a proposed intervention framework to facilitate the promotion of digital well-being, based on the quantitative data and the qualitative suggestions.

Ethical Considerations

The Data Privacy Act 2012 and the institutional reviews determined the ethical principles of this research. Before collecting data, an informed consent process will be established where participants will have the purpose of the study explained, be informed that their participation is voluntary, and have the right to withdraw without penalty. All student names and ID numbers will not be collected to maintain anonymity; instead, responses will be assigned a numerical code. All data will also remain confidential since it will be stored in a secure cloud folder and only accessed by the researcher and destroyed after the required time limit. Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of anxiety, the researcher will furnish participants with a debriefing sheet at the survey’s conclusion, including contact information for the University Counseling Center for any student seeking psychological support.

Presentation of Results

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Frequencies of Sex

Sex	Counts	% of Total
Female	117	59.1%
Male	81	40.9%

Frequencies of AGE

AGE	Counts	% of Total
20 and below	171	86.4%
21 and above	27	13.6%

Focusing on the age and gender distribution of the sample will help understand how demographic characteristics such as age and gender affect respondents' social media usage patterns and anxiety regarding privacy. Of 198 respondents in the sample, 117 (59.1%) were female and 81 (40.9%) were male. The overwhelming majority of respondents were in their 20s or younger (171 or 86.4%) as compared to only 27 respondents (13.6%) who were 21 or older. Based on this sample, it is likely that results will show experiences and anxiety that reflect largely on Gen Z students in their early years in college; this particular population has traditionally experienced high levels of digital engagement, which may influence their levels of concern about social media privacy.

Table 2. Share Content Anxiety

	Mean	SD
1. I feel anxious about the fact that others might find my actions awkward.	3.40	0.981
2. I am concerned about being ridiculed by others for the content I have shared.	3.29	0.910
3. I am concerned about the fact that the content I share will not be liked by others.	3.36	1.036
4. I am afraid that my close friends will not approve of my behavior.	3.24	1.109
5. I would feel uncomfortable when my friends publicly express their dislike about the content I have shared.	3.23	1.087
6. I am concerned about disapproval of my behaviors by others.	3.24	0.966
7. I am concerned about being judged about my shared contents by my friends in their presents of others	3.34	1.024
Mean	3.30	0.790

According to Table 2, the college students assessed had a moderate to high degree of shared content anxiety, shown by a mean of 3.30 on the composite mean. The major factor driving this anxiety was the fear of being viewed as socially awkward with the mean score of Item 1 providing the highest mean score, 3.40, in relation to being anxious that other people will see you as socially awkward if you share content on social media. Additionally, those surveyed had concerns about being judged by their peer group in social settings from a mean of 3.34, and about being liked for the content they create and share from a mean of 3.36. While the overall mean scores from each of the factors remain in the 3.23-3.40 range; however, the standard deviations (between 0.910-1.109) suggest variability between students regarding intensity of these feelings. Overall, these results illustrate that for college students, sharing content is inextricably linked to concerns regarding negative social evaluations and desire for peer approval, which contributes significantly to their overall anxiety regarding social media.

Table 3. Privacy Concern Anxiety

	Mean	SD
1. The possibility of having my private information acquired by others makes me feel anxious.	3.59	1.037
2. The possibility of having my private information shared publicly makes me anxious	3.60	1.060
3. I feel uneasy when my friends share my private information with people I do not know.	3.71	1.092
4. I would be concerned if my personal space is accessed without my consent.	3.76	1.099
5. I feel anxious about how social media companies/executives handle privacy policy regarding my private life.	3.52	1.031
Overall Mean	3.63	0.910

According to the data presented in Table 3, students show considerable to a high level of anxiety regarding privacy related issues as indicated by the composite mean score of 3.63 (SD=0.910). Anxiety related to unauthorized access to someone's personal area had the highest level of anxiety overall (Mean=3.76) and the second highest for anxiety related to the concern of friends sharing someone's private information with a new and anonymous person (Mean =3.71). This suggests that students possess a great degree of anxiety about violating personal and social boundaries and being granted permission to share personal information or to gain access to someone's personal space without permission. While concerns related to how social media executives handle their privacy policies were rated the lowest in comparison to other groups in this sample (Mean=3.52), it continues to be a major source of concern for those interviewed. Overall, these results suggest that survey respondents have a general feeling of continuous

fear (anxiety) associated with losing control over their own personal information and to the extent that their digital identity is not managed properly/appropriately, whether it be by friends or by social media organizations.

Table 4. Interaction Anxiety

	Mean	SD
1. I feel anxious when talking with people I have just met.	3.22	0.993
2. I feel nervous when I talk with people I do not know very well.	3.45	1.030
3. I feel uneasy while making new friends	3.10	1.057
4. I feel tense when I meet someone for the first time.	3.37	1.057
5. I am afraid of interacting with others.	3.13	1.080
6. I feel nervous when I have to talk with other about myself.	3.39	1.010
Overall Mean	3.28	0.843

According to Table 4, college students' anxiety about interacting (one of the components of their overall anxiety about social media) is at a moderate-to-high level based on how they rated themselves on every one of the interaction anxiety characteristics listed in Table 4. The average response (3.28 out of 5) indicates that college students often feel anxious about situations where they are meeting new people (Mean = 3.45) or sharing private information with others (Mean = 3.39), and, because both of these events regularly happen online where the lines between privacy and public interaction are often blurred, it is not surprising that most participants felt at risk when meeting new people or making new friends. In addition, the relatively small range standard deviation (0.843 – 1.080) among all participants demonstrates that there is a fair number of college students who have generalized feelings of anxiety regarding their interactions with other people and that they feel these anxious interactions occur at a high frequency or on many also occur between groups with different social status during social media platforms. Lastly, through the lens of the research you conducted, it can be concluded that interaction anxiety plays an important role in a college student's social anxiety because it likely increases the amount of social pressure they feel when they try to navigate the social hierarchies and maintain their privacy while using social media.

Table 5. Self-evaluation Anxiety

	Mean	SD
1. I feel anxious about making a negative impression of people.	3.38	0.953
2. I am concerned about people thinking poorly of me.	3.23	0.974
3. I feel anxious about not being able to meet people's expectations.	3.31	1.123
Overall Mean	3.31	0.846

Results in Table 5 indicate that college students report moderate levels of Self-Evaluation Anxiety based on their use of social media (Mean score = 3.31). Additionally, respondents showed the greatest concern regarding "making a negative impression of others" (3.38), which demonstrates that the curated nature of social media provides additional pressure to maintain a positive digital identity. In addition, while participants showed the least concern for "people thinking poorly about me" (Mean = 3.23), the high standard deviation for anxiety related to "failing to meet the expectations of others" (SD = 1.123) indicates that there is considerable variation among students' internalization of the external pressures placed on them by social media. Thus, it can be implied that many students associate their self-worth with their social media presence and view the fear of negative evaluation, as well as the necessity to meet the expectations of their digital audience, as ongoing sources of psychological stress.

Table 5. Summary of Social Media Anxiety

	Mean	SD
Shared Content Anxiety	3.30	0.790
Privacy Concern Anxiety	3.63	0.910
Interaction Anxiety	3.28	0.843

Table 5. Summary of Social Media Anxiety

	Mean	SD
Self-evaluation Anxiety	3.31	0.846
General Social Media Anxiety	3.37	0.688

According to the analysis of Table 5 data from the survey of college students, they show moderate to high levels of general social media anxiety based on the mean scores ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.688$) on each measure of social anxiety. The largest source of student anxiety about social media is likely Privacy Concern Anxiety based on a higher mean score than other types of anxiety ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.910$) related to social media, which indicates that students are most concerned about how their information will be kept secure and used. Other sources of social media anxiety that were ranked slightly lower than Privacy Concern Anxiety include Self-Evaluation Anxiety ($M = 3.31$), which relates to how students perceive themselves in the context of creating a digital identity, and Shared Content Anxiety ($M = 3.30$), which reflects how students feel about what and how others will respond to their shared content on social media. The measure with the lowest mean score for social media anxiety on the four anxiety measures is Interaction Anxiety ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.843$), which nonetheless contributes to the overall students' anxiety about social media. Furthermore, as indicated by the relatively low standard deviations for the four types of social media anxiety (privacy, self-evaluation, shared content, and interaction), the students are in agreement about privacy concerns as being the main factor contributing to their anxiety about social media.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix

			Shared Content Anxiety	Privacy Concern Anxiety	Interaction Anxiety	Self-evaluation Anxiety	General Social Media Anxiety
Shared Content Anxiety	Pearson's r	—					
	df	—					
	p-value	—					
Privacy Concern Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.625***	—				
	df	196	—				
	p-value	<.001	—				
Interaction Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.494***	0.439***	—			
	df	196	196	—			
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—			
Self-evaluation Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.649***	0.522***	0.614***	—		
	df	196	196	196	—		
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—		
General Social Media Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.867***	0.800***	0.785***	0.804***	—	
	df	196	196	196	196	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	

Table 6. Correlation Matrix

	Shared Content Anxiety	Privacy Concern Anxiety	Interaction Anxiety	Self-evaluation Anxiety	General Social Media Anxiety
--	------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6 provides evidence, through the correlation matrix, that all dimensions of social media anxiety and privacy-related anxiety among collegiate population are positively and significantly related to each other ($p < .001$). The results indicate that all variables studied have a strong correlation with one another; however, the highest level of correlation exists between the General Social Media Anxiety dimension and the specific sub-types Shared Content Anxiety ($r = .867$) and Self-evaluation Anxiety ($r = .804$). Of the specific anxiety dimensions, the dimension that has the strongest relationship with another dimension is Shared Content Anxiety and Self-evaluation Anxiety ($r = .649$). These findings suggest that students who are concerned with the material that they post on social media also are likely to be highly anxious about how other individuals perceive them. Since the Pearson's r values range from a moderate .439 to a very strong .867, the findings support that the different anxiety dimensions studied are not separate but rather closely connected components of the collegiate experience in digital environments.

SHIELD Framework



Figure 1. SHIELD Framework

The Framework for S.H.I.E.L.D. (Strategic Holistic Intervention for Empowering Learners in Digital Spaces) is a large-scale roadmap to strengthen student resilience against the multiple sources of stress students encounter as a result of the increasing digital nature of society. The first intervention offered in this framework is the security and settings workshops. This workshop addresses the most significant source of anxiety identified by students: concerns about privacy. The Privacy Audit process allows students to move from just being uncomfortable with complex policies (Mean=.52) to attaining technical mastery (Mean=3.76) and being able to neutralize their fear of intruders in their private lives. Students will not only gain confidence due to the foundational security of their information but also through involvement in the Healthy Habits and Digital Well-Being initiatives via Digital Detox challenges and seminars that help reduce anxiety regarding the general use of social media (mean = 3.37). Specifically, these workshops help students to identify and deconstruct the curated nature of social media platforms and decouple their innate sense of self-worth from the remaining unstable metrics and unrealizable expectations of their audience.

The framework brings together Interpersonal Communication Training (ICT) and Digital Representation Management (DRM) to help bridge the gap between the digital and "real" world. The inclusion of role-play exercises that simulate moving from a digital environment to a physical environment will directly reduce anxiety about meeting new people or sharing personal information for 35% of users (mean = 3.45). Evaluation Resilience modules further support users in feeling socially confident about themselves by utilizing cognitive behavioral coaching (CBC) to address the strong correlation ($r = .804$) between fear of self-evaluation and

general distress. By helping users manage their fear of being ridiculed, students are encouraged to move from a "performative" digital identity to an authentic one, thus developing a healthier relationship with their digital selves.

Finally, through Digital Literacy in Data Rights and Digital Peer Support Networks, the framework provides users with the tools to ensure the longevity of their use. Digital literacy in data rights helps users understand data ownership and the legalities of operating social media platforms. By educating users regarding their digital footprint, digital literacy in data rights will eliminate the continuous fear of losing control over their digital footprint, which will allow for continued use of social media. Digital Peer Support Networks create a support system for students to normalize the process of setting personal boundaries with friends. Establishing digital ambassadors as a relatable means of support will help create a perception of safety for students to establish and maintain personal boundaries regarding disclosing private information with their peers (mean = 3.71). All six pillars will change from a source of fear to a managed source of empowerment and social connections within the digital world.

Discussion

The demographic profile of college students in the Philippines indicates primarily younger women; 59.1% of the total sample are girls, while 86.4% are 20 or younger. This data is important to consider because previous studies on this population, specifically those with women, have shown significant digital engagement and social media usage among this group, which has led to different experiences related to privacy anxiety when compared to older men/female respondents (Fabella, 2022; Lim et al., 2022; Çavuş, 2018). In this case, the demographics would likely result in people experiencing higher levels of difficulty accessing and using content due to social expectations, a greater fear of peer evaluation, and overall identity exploration, especially with social media as a medium. In addition, because males constitute a considerable portion of the sample at 40.9%, gender differences in levels of privacy knowledge and anxiety would be an area to examine, as there have been several studies in the region finding differences related to sex with respect to concerns related to privacy and online activities (Çavuş, 2018). Therefore, when considering the demographic characteristics of this sample, one could build a multi-dimensional model to describe how the four dimensions of anxiety relate to demographic variables in the higher education system in the Philippines.

Shared Content Anxiety—social evaluation and fear of public self-presentation—has moderate-to-high Shared Content Anxiety scores, including [highest scores]: (1) fear of being considered awkward by others (3.40), (2) concern about judgment from peers (3.34), and (3) concern about content not being liked (3.36). This pattern supports prior research among students in the Philippines in which online self-presentation and peer evaluation have been identified as key contributors to student online distress as a result of social networks being experienced with heightened intensity and frequency (Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Lim et al., 2022). The small standard deviations of response means in these three areas (0.91–1.11) show wide agreement among respondents concerning these issues and imply that concerns over negative social evaluations in sharing content represent a common cause of distress, not an isolated one. Theoretical support for these findings is consistent with privacy-and-image anxiety theory, where content-related anxieties are often accompanied by social-survey anxieties; thus, it is clear that the need for privacy and digital literacy training specific to the dimension of curated self-presentation is critical to support and nurture appropriate digital citizen behaviors (Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Çavuş et al., 2018).

Anxiety About Privacy Concerns: Data control and consent and governance of platforms generate the most significant anxiety. Privacy Concern Anxiety (mean 3.63, SD 0.910) is the highest of the dimensions analyzed. The highest anxiety levels are for: The highest anxiety levels are associated with unauthorized access to a person's private space (3.76) and friends sharing their private information with strangers (3.71). This survey indicates that people in the Philippines are particularly sensitive to violations of personal boundaries and to the disclosure of information about their friends, reflecting a high sensitivity to privacy issues. The Philippine emphasis on awareness of data privacy, combined with the high number of Filipino students reporting being exposed digitally to identity theft and concern about protecting personal data and identity (Cabacungan et al., 2022; Mendoza et al., 2022; Sinha & Sinha, 2024), would account for the preeminence of privacy concerning digital data privacy between peer-to-peer networks in Filipino college students, who need to increase privacy literacy programs to focus on how to protect their privacy through data protection methods on campuses (Canada et al., 2025; Cabacungan et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2022).

Self-evaluation Anxiety and Interaction Anxiety has two dimensions of concern. There is moderate anxiety (3.28) regarding social participation, with the highest level of concern when engaging in social situations with people we do not know (3.45) and providing personal information (3.39). This convergence illustrates that participants have difficulty expanding their social networks in online settings where boundaries are permeable, and the reputational risk of meeting people they do not know is quite high. In looking at the self-evaluation anxiety dimension (mean 3.31), we learn that the participants have concerns about leaving a negative impression (3.38) and fear not meeting the expectations of others (SD 1.123), which suggests this is further evidence of self-worth being tied to their online persona and the judgment of their audience. Data from this study support previous findings that show how an individual's perception of themselves creates expectations from social feedback, appearance concerns, and performance expectations in a digital setting, as well as regional studies on privacy and social media literacy in the Philippines (Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Çavuş et al., 2018; Lin, 2023). Most of the indicators have a narrow standard deviation (0.843-1.080), which indicates a common experience across participants and provides support for the idea that campus-wide influences on the anxiety experienced in these dimensions are a result of peer norms, social comparisons, and expectations among the student population.

The total overall general social media anxiety score across all five dimensions described in the tables below is 3.37 (SD 0.688), with privacy concern anxiety contributing the most to total distress. The dimensions are all positively correlated and statistically significant ($p < .001$), with shared content anxiety showing a positive correlation with self-evaluation anxiety at $r \approx 0.65$, while general anxiety and its sub-dimensions (i.e., shared content, privacy concerns, and self-evaluation) also exhibit positive correlations. These patterns support the view that online fears/concerns are not siloed; rather, they create a web of associations in which fears about sharing, having others view what they share, interpreting what they share, and presenting themselves are reinforcing. This integrated finding supports the prior work done in the Philippines and elsewhere, highlighting that digital life creates a variety of psychosocial stressors that happen at the same time and interact at the same time in terms of being mental well-being stressors (Fabella & Lagarde, 2022; Lim et al., 2022; Çavuş et al., 2018). Finally, the consistency and strength of these relationships imply that intervention methods should be holistic, treating multiple dimensions of anxiety at once, rather than treating only isolated symptoms.

Conclusions

Research results indicate that students attending a college or university can experience moderate to high levels of anxiety relating to social media, reporting an overall mean anxiety level of slightly over 3 (3.37). One of the dimensions of anxiety associated with social media was identified as being the most significant and most stressful to students - Privacy Concern Anxiety (3.63). Privacy concern anxiety appears to stem from fears about having personal space violated (i.e., unauthorized access) and the likelihood of having one's private information shared by friends. Though college students are often engaged digitally, there is also a pervasive sense of vulnerability when it comes to managing one's digital footprint and protecting one's private information.

Additionally, this research has uncovered a strong psychological connection between how students portray themselves using digital media and how they perceive the evaluations of them made by others. Specifically, Shared Content Anxiety (3.30) and Self-evaluation Anxiety (3.31) are highly correlated ($r = 0.649$). This could indicate that students tie their self-worth to their digital self-presentation; therefore, the fear of being perceived as "awkward," or not meeting someone's judgment of them as it pertains to social media use creates a constant source of pain for many students. The pressure to present oneself in a way perceived favorably and curated by social media can contribute to a great deal of stress during both social engagements and when sharing media with others.

To summarize, the Correlation Matrix shows that different types of social media-based anxiety can be heavily correlated ($p < .001$) with each other. Additionally, high levels of correlation exist between General Social Media Anxiety & each specific subtype (most specifically, Shared Content Anxiety; $r = .867$). Therefore, these values highlight how these types of anxiety are not independent of each other, but rather demonstrate how they are a complex and multifaceted psychological phenomena. The demographic characteristics of this population are heavily biased towards females who belong to Generation-Z, with 59.1% identifying as female and 86.4% being younger than 20 years old. Consequently, this suggests that this population has high levels of digital immersion and high sensitivity to personal space, which contributes to them being anxious about social interaction through the medium of social media.

Recommendations

Educational organizations should create programing focused on advanced cyber safety, rather than basic cyber safety to include attention to "Interpersonal Privacy." These programs can include workshops on creating digital boundaries with peers as well as an understanding of how to interpret and utilize the privacy policies of technology platforms to minimize the high levels of "Privacy Concern Anxiety."

Counseling services should utilize a cognitive-behavioral approach to assist students in separating their self-esteem from social media metrics (likes, follows etc.). Given the documented connection between self-evaluation of shared content and the anxiety produced from such evaluations, using a cognitive-behavioral approach could aid students in coping with the stress of achieving the idealized image of a "perfect" digital self.

Because one of the main causes of anxiety is the unconsented sharing of personal information by friends, student organizations should promote awareness of "Digital Consent", through campaigns. Defining the social norms of tagging or sharing with others will reduce Interaction Anxiety and enhance the sense of security that students feel regarding the digital campus communities to which they belong.

Funding: Please add: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1.] Alkis, Y., Kadirhan, Z., Sat, M., (2017). Development and Validation of Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media., *Computers in Human Behavior* 72. (2017) 296-303
- [2.] Cabacungan, A., Delima, K., Mortiz, J., Paguta, L., & Billones, R. (2022). Recovery from Long COVID: How College Students Thrive During Lockdown. *Tazkiya Journal of Psychology*, 10(2), 85-96. <https://doi.org/10.15408/tazkiya.v10i2.26341>
- [3.] Canada, J., Lara, A., Josol, C., & Albon, E. (2025). Online Privacy Concerns, Impacts and Coping Strategies among College Students in Digos City, Philippines: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 51(10), 605-619. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i102518>
- [4.] Çavuş, S., Akman, E., & Ayhan, B. (2018). TRANSFORMATION OF SECRECY AND PRIVACY: SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIOR OF TURKISH AND KYRGYZ STUDENTS. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (43), 561-580. <https://doi.org/10.21563/sutad.510726>
- [5.] Fabella, F. and Lagarde, M. (2022). Social Media as a Danger to Mental Health: The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Anxiety Among Selected College Students. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 9(11), 496-501. <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20221165>
- [6.] Lim, L., Regencia, Z., Cruz, J., Ho, F., Rodolfo, M., Ly-Uson, J., ... & Baja, E. (2022). Assessing the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, shift to online learning, and social media use on the mental health of college students in the Philippines: A mixed-method study protocol. *Plos One*, 17(5), e0267555. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0267555>
- [7.] Lin, X. (2023). The Impact of Social Media on Chinese High School Students' Body and Image Anxiety. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 2(1), 301-308. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/2/2022470>
- [8.] Mendoza, A., Phillips, D., & Mariani, M. (2022). Awareness of Data Security of Facebook users in the Philippines. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 7(6), 631-643. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.76.65>
- [9.] Oducado, R., Sales, M., Magarzo, A., Panes, P., & Lapastora, J. (2019). PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDE ON USING SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSIBLY: TOWARD SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY IN NURSING EDUCATION. *Belitung Nursing Journal*, 5(3), 116-122. <https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.789>
- [10.] Olipas, C. (2023). Exploring Differences in Demographic Profiles and Digital Footprint Awareness between Private and Public-School Students: A Comparative Study. *East Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(4), 1415-1436. <https://doi.org/10.55927/eajmr.v2i4.3552>
- [11.] Reyes, A. and Reyes, B. (2015). Social Anxiety Disorder of First Year University Students. *Iamure International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.7718/iamure.v10i1.867>
- [12.] Sinha, S. and Sinha, S. (2024). RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL DESIRABILITY, SOCIAL ANXIETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE OF SECONDARY AND HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF PURULIA TOWN., 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.58532/v3bisop1ch1>